

## David Lynch and Vedic “Science”

I was recently offered a free ticket to see David Lynch give a talk at Emerson College. The talk was titled “Consciousness, Creativity, and the Brain”. I didn’t know why a movie director would have any particular insights on these subjects but I decided that at the least it would be amusing.

The talk was held in a huge and beautiful theater in downtown Boston, ornate with two large balconies and, from where I was sitting at least, largely full. We were all handed free DVDs on the way in as well as “more information” forms with beautiful typography. The form were headed “The David Lynch Educational Foundation For Consciousness-Raising Education And World Peace”. (The “And World Peace” seems like it should be a joke.) The dean of the college introduced the event by droning on about how great Emerson College was. I tuned out but the people I went with told me he gave the standard distancing-himself-from-the-event speech, something about how they provided a range of voices to encourage the students (profound voice:) “to quest, and to question”.

Then the president of the David Lynch Foundation came up and introduced David Lynch, who apparently didn’t have a talk prepared and just took some questions from the audience. I suspect some of the questions were plants, because they sounded so suspiciously knowledgeable about meditation, but maybe all the local meditators were attracted to the event.

In photographs, Lynch looks like an old British dude who would have a deep and thoughtful voice. Instead, his voice is high and squeaky and sort of gimmicky-sounding, which also made it hard to take him seriously. He finished up and the Foundation president came back to introduce Dr. John Haeglin, who he presented as one of the leading physicists of our day. And where does this great mind work? The Maharishi University of Management, although the announcer cleverly pronounced this so it sounded like “Murshy University”, which is more plausible as an actual school. The Maharishi University of Management (MUM), however, is a phony organization set up the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who claims that he can fly. (The Maharishi, you may recall, also seduced The Beatles. Their later disappointment was the source of the song “Sexy Sadie”, which was originally titled “Maharishi”).

Haeglin is the Maharishi’s main man in the US, running for president on the Maharishi’s political party (the Natural Law Party), which almost received federal funds from Perot’s Reform Party, although it narrowly lost to Pat Buchanan. (I had my Sidekick with me, so I looked all this up on the Web while I was listening.) Haeglin had a tricky job ahead of him. He had to explain to the audience that practicing the Maharishi’s Transcendental Meditation (TM) would send out a magical field that would make everybody nearby happy and peaceful. But he also had to do so in such a way that this audience of college kids, didn’t just break out laughing. The answer: science.

Haeglin gave some reasonably-accurate descriptions of recent innovations in Physics, noting that reductionism had caused us to realize that the superficial diversity asked an underlying uniformity of, he claimed, vibrating strings (string theory) that connect all of us together. Now Haeglin thinks that TM will cause happy feelings to be transmitted through the strings into nearby people. But even this seems too absurd, so he changes tacks and tries to explain it in a common sense way. ‘If everybody is fearful and scared,’ he says, ‘you can sort of feel it in the air and you start to be scared. But if everyone is happy, then it’s just the opposite. TM works in the same way — it puts happiness in the air.’ He never directly connected this to his comments about string theory and I didn’t really see it until I reflected on it later.

Haeglin has done several “scientific” tests, claiming that a group of meditators can lower the crime rate, although when actual scientists checked some of his numbers, they found he had fabricated the crime rate statistics. And David Lynch explained that the goal of his foundation is to raise \$7 billion so they can provide Transcendental Meditation in every school. (The David Lynch Foundation’s website claims that TM can cure classroom stress, clinical depression, learning disorders, high blood pressure, and academic underachievement — oh, right, and cause world peace.

Then he introduced a Dr. Fred Travis, also from MUM, who proceeded to do an EEG of some kid’s brain right on stage. He showed some diagrams of the brain, insisting it had a “CEO” which told the rest of it what to do. Normally, he said, the brain’s pieces all scurry about doing whatever they feel like. But Transcendental Meditation strengthens your CEO so he can get all the pieces of the brain working together, doing whatever the CEO wants them to do. He demonstrated this by showing the boy’s brainwaves normally: all over the place, doing different things. Then he asked the boy to meditate and zoomed in on two brain waves, which started moving in tandem. What this has to do with anything remains a mystery to me.

Then Lynch came out and took some more questions. Nobody called him on this nonsense (I was tempted to, but didn’t). But *you* can — Lynch is going on [a 20 city tour of universities to spread this nonsense](#). The entire event was taped so it could be [webcast from his website](#).

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